

Donna Sadler
144 Elizabeth St.
Norwich, CT 06360

Senate Bill 918

Thanks to the co-chairs of the Public Health Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am testifying in support of SB 918 as a member of the steering committee of Our Families Can't Wait! (OFCW), a statewide organization of families advocating for our loved ones with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We, my husband and I, are parents and legal guardians of our 23 year old son who has an Intellectual/Developmental Disability. My husband and I have always been our son's staunchest advocates. We have had to fight for medical treatments, insurance issues, and his right to have an appropriate classroom situation. Now we are fighting for him and for thousands of other individuals across Connecticut, to receive the support and services that they need from DDS.

Our son has been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD on the Autism spectrum) as well as an intellectual disability. Sean uses a wheelchair and is unable to speak. His inability to talk, as well as the PDD, can cause him anxiety, which causes some aggressive behavioral issues that are helped by medication. Sean needs to have someone with him at all times and assistance for most of his everyday needs.

After we fought our school system, our son was finally placed in an appropriate classroom situation and with a wonderful teacher from Project Learn, he gradually transformed from a frustrated, anxiety-ridden, aggressive child into an adult who can function and socialize in a group situation, who can communicate in his own way and can be productive doing small tasks/jobs. He has continued to make progress at his DDS-funded day program at Horizons in Windham, which gives him a feeling of self-worth, pride and happiness. A wonderful quality of life! We are grateful for all the support he gets there.

But that's all at risk now. Governor Malloy has cut \$13.9 million from the DDS budget in the current fiscal year, including a \$5 million cut to employment supports and day programs. The proposed budget for 2016-17 would annualize these cuts and add additional cuts. It's not clear how DDS-funded nonprofit agencies like Horizons, which have struggled for 7 years without a cost of living increase, will be able to continue absorbing these cuts. Will our son lose his day program/ Will his staffing levels be cut? Will high school graduates be delayed or denied funding for day programs and employment supports? And what will happen to individuals like our son who are waiting for a group home placements? Last year, families made their voices heard at the Capitol in unprecedented numbers. We created a public outcry about the inhumane DDS policy that only provides residential placements to people with I/DD after their caregivers die or become incapacitated. Our greatest worry is what will happen to our son when we can no longer care for him. As a result of families' advocacy last year, the legislature allocated \$4 million for 100 families on the waiting list whose caregivers were 70 or older. We're happy for those individuals who received placements, but there are still more than 2,000 individuals on the waiting list!! Some waiting for as long as 10 years! The governor's budget includes no new funding for residential placements, and more than \$20 million in new cuts.

We need SB 918 so people like Sean will get the support that they need when we aren't here to take care of them. DDS Funding Can't Wait! The need is urgent. The need is now!